United Nations A/54/690

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 January 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 124

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Jan Piotr **Jaremczuk** (Poland)

I. Introduction

1. At its 17th plenary meeting, on 17 September 1999, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-fourth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) First report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999;[2]

(c) First report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001;[3]

(d) Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session;[4]

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi (A/54/176);

(f) Report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/54/208);

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/54/32).
[2] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/52/7).
[3] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/54/7).
[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16*, (A/53/16).

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(g) Report of the Secretary-General on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/54/221);

(h) Report of the Secretary-General on the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/54/262);

(i) Report of the Secretary-General on a cost-accounting system for conference services (A/53/257);

(j) Report of the Secretary-General on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services (A/53/833);

(k) Report of the Secretary-General on career development in language services (A/53/919 and Corr.1);

(l) Report of the Secretary-General on career development in language services: the post of reviser (A/53/919/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1 (Russian only);

(m) Report of the Secretary-General on career development in language services: reducing excessive vacancy rates at some duty stations: the possibility of introducing a system of managed assignments (A/53/919/Add.2 and Add.2/Corr.1 (French only));

(n) Report of the Secretary-General on a cost-accounting system for conference services (A/52/1000);

(o) Note by the Secretary-General on career developments in language services — measures aimed at reducing excessive vacancy rates at some duty stations: elements of a system of managed assignments (A/C.5/54/28);

(p) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (A/52/685);

(q) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (A/51/946 and Corr.1 (Russian only));

(r) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on United Nations publications (A/53/669).

3. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 8th, 10th, 11th, 40th and 50th meetings, from 18 to 20 October and on 30 November and 23 December 1999. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/54/SR.8, 10, 11, 40 and 50).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/54/L.19

4. At the 50th meeting, on 23 December, the representative of Tunisia and coordinator of informal consultations on the item introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/54/L.19) submitted by the Chairman on the basis of informal consultations.

5. At the same meeting, the representative of Algeria made a statement and orally proposed an amendment to include, in operative paragraph 24 of section B, after the words "United Nations Office at Nairobi" the words "no later than January 2001".

6. Also at the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/54/L.19 as orally amended without a vote (see para. 7).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

7. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions and decisions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 43/222 of 21 December 1988, 47/202 of 22 December 1992, 48/222 of 23 December 1993, 49/221 of 23 December 1994, 50/11 of 2 November 1995, 50/206 of 23 December 1995, 51/211 of 18 December 1996 and 15 September 1997, 52/23 of 25 November 1997, 52/214 of 22 December 1997 and 53/208 of 18 December 1998 and decisions 38/401 of 23 September 1983 and 52/468 of 31 March 1998,

A
Calendar of conferences and meetings

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences,[5]

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work of the Committee on Conferences, and takes note of its report,[1] subject to the present resolution;

2. *Approves* the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000-2001, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[6] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Authorizes* the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000-2001 that may become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide all the conference services required as a result of decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, taking into account, as necessary, the procedures established by the Assembly in its resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 42/211 of 21 December 1987;

5. *Reaffirms* its decision that the headquarters rule shall be adhered to by all bodies, and decides that waivers to the headquarters rule shall be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations recommended by the Committee on Conferences for adoption by the General Assembly;

6. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat took into account the arrangements referred to in paragraph 10 of section A of General Assembly resolution 53/208 with regard to the two holidays of Eid al-Fitr, which falls on 8 January (to be observed on 7 January) and 27 December 2000, and Eid al-Adha, which falls on 16 March 2000, when drafting the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000-2001;

7. *Also notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat took into account the arrangements referred to in paragraph 11 of section A of General Assembly resolution 53/208 concerning Orthodox Good Friday (which fell on 9 April 1999), which falls on

[5] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/54/32).

[6] Ibid., annex.

28 April 2000 and 13 April 2001 in the calendar for the next biennium, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to observe this decision when planning their meetings;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General, when planning the calendar of conferences and meetings, to make every effort to avoid simultaneous peak periods at the various duty stations;

9. *Reaffirms* the provisions established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/11 regarding multilingualism;

10. *Notes* that the procedure proposed in paragraph 172 of the report of the Committee on Conferences[1] precludes observers from fully participating in the work of the Committee;

11. *Invites* the Committee on Conferences to keep under review its procedure regarding the participation of observers;

B

Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Having considered the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States,[7] the report of the Secretary-General on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi,[8] the report of the Secretary-General on the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi,[9] the report of the Secretary-General on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services,[10] the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on these issues[11] and the report of the Secretary-General on career development in language services,[12]

1. *Notes with concern* the proposed reduction of resources for conference services for the biennium 2000-2001, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that efficiency measures are carefully analysed to avoid any negative impact on conference services, in the light of the level and quality of services provided to Member States;

2. *Emphasizes* the importance of providing adequate conference-servicing resources to all United Nations conference centres;

3. *Notes with appreciation* that the overall utilization factor for 1998 exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent, in particular at Geneva and Vienna;

4. *Encourages* the optimum utilization of conference services in New York, taking into full consideration issues of efficiency and effectiveness, which should include the limitations of small delegations;

5. *Emphasizes*, therefore, the need to ensure equal opportunity for all Member States to participate fully in meeting their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, and in this connection urges intergovernmental bodies when adopting their

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[7] A/54/208.

[8] A/54/221.

[9] A/54/262.

[10] A/53/833.

[11] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/54/7), paras. 108-114.

[12] A/53/919 and Add.2.

programmes of work to avoid, as much as possible, *inter alia*, the scheduling of simultaneous, parallel and/or late night meetings;

6. *Reiterates its request* to the Committee on Conferences to continue to consult with those bodies that consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources;

7. *Requests* the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences to transmit a letter to the chairpersons of all bodies that utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure (80 per cent) of their allocated conference resources in the previous year, informing them of the problem and drawing their attention to the significant loss of meeting time, with a view to encouraging appropriate action on their part so as to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources;

8. *Notes* the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of sessional bodies, in view of the increased requests for meetings of regional and other major groups, and welcomes the fact that 83 per cent of the requests for interpretation services for such meetings were met, while 100 per cent of the requests for facilities only were met;

9. *Notes with concern* the difficulties experienced by some Member States owing to the lack of conference services for some meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;

10. *Regrets* that 17 per cent of the requests for interpretation services made by regional and other major groupings of Member States were not met, while recognizing that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority;

11. *Decides* to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2000-2001 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision;

12. *Urges* intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programme of work and to notify conference services, well in advance, of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States;

13. *Decides* that full interpretation services, in the six official languages, must be ensured for the meetings of intergovernmental bodies for the full duration of those meetings;

14. *Expresses concern* that the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are still underutilized, as recorded during the last reporting period;

15. *Reiterates its call* for better utilization of the conference facilities at Nairobi;

16. *Urges* all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements, and encourages Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to increase their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi;

17. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving this situation, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to that end;

18. *Takes note with appreciation* of the decision by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to hold the Fifth Expert Group Meeting on Financial Issues of Agenda 21 at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

19. *Encourages* other departments, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to follow the example set by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

20. *Also encourages* all United Nations bodies and expert groups not subject to the headquarters rule to hold some of their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

21. *Reaffirms* the general principle established in the headquarters rule, and, in particular, that all meetings related to environment and human settlements that are organized by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), respectively, should be held at Nairobi, being the headquarters of the Programme and Habitat;

22. *Discourages strongly* any invitation for hosting meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for United Nations centres with a low utilization level;

23. *Requests* the Committee on Conferences to consider the possibility of holding its 2000 substantive session at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

24. *Decides* to establish a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi no later than January 2001;

25. *Decides* to strengthen the interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Vienna;

26. *Encourages* the Secretariat to continue further the active dialogue between conference services and the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies, with a view to improving the provision of conference services;

27. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure an increase in the utilization of the regional centres in future work programmes and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

28. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to update the administrative instruction of 8 May 1987[13] on guidelines for the preparation of host Government agreements falling under General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985;

29. *Notes with appreciation* the renovation of the Economic and Social Council Chamber with the voluntary contribution of a Member State;

C
Documentation and publication-related matters

1. *Reiterates its decision* that if a report is submitted late to the conference services, the reasons for this should be included in a footnote to the document;

[13] ST/AI/342.

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are communicated to Member States within fifteen days after the close of the session;

3. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the *Official Records* of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly include information on the adoption of the resolutions, such as voting records and sponsors, before the text of each resolution, in the six official languages of the Organization;

4. *Notes with deep concern* the low rate of compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of documentation;

5. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages of the General Assembly;

6. *Notes with deep concern* that the provisions of paragraphs 24 and 25 of section B of its resolution 52/214 and paragraphs 11 and 12 of section B of its resolution 53/208 are not being fully implemented;

7. *Reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General direct all departments to include, where appropriate, the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(a) A summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

8. *Reiterates* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and expert bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

9. *Reiterates its request* to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to submit its reports in accordance with paragraph 12 of section B of General Assembly resolution 53/208;

10. *Recalls* its decision in paragraph 2 (b) of part II of its resolution 41/213, and emphasizes that, in future, proposed programme budgets should be considered by the General Assembly in fascicle form, together with recommendations on them by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and that the programme budgets should be issued in their final form after approval by the General Assembly with the changes to the resource level annexed to the approved programme budget;

11. *Notes with concern* the decline in the number of documents submitted to conference services in time for processing before the beginning of a session, and requests the Secretary-General to take urgent remedial measures to rectify this alarming situation, including a system of responsibility and accountability;

12. *Requests* the Secretary-General to publish, prior to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, updated versions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation in the six official languages of the Organization;

13. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to publish the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations in the six official languages of the Organization when their consolidation is completed;

14. *Urges* intergovernmental bodies, when feasible, to become more actively involved in rationalizing their meeting schedules in order to ensure the timely distribution of all related documentation, and requests the Secretary-General to submit proposals based on these reviews, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

D

Translation- and interpretation-related matters

Having considered the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi[14] and the report of the Secretary-General on career development in language services: the post of reviser,[15]

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue the efforts to utilize new technologies, such as computer-assisted translation, remote translation, terminology databases and speech recognition, in the six official languages, so as to enhance further the productivity of conference services, and to keep the General Assembly informed of the introduction and use of any other new technology;

2. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to continue the efforts to ensure that training opportunities in the six official languages are equally available to all language staff, including those at duty stations away from Headquarters;

3. *Decides* that, in the absence of a General Assembly decision to the contrary, the use of remote interpretation shall not constitute an alternative to the current institutionalized system of interpretation;

4. *Also decides* that the use of remote interpretation would not affect the quality of interpretation or in itself lead to any further reduction in language posts, nor will it affect the equal treatment of the six official languages;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to keep under review the introduction and use of any new technology, in particular remote interpretation, and to report thereon to the General Assembly on a regular basis;

6. *Requests* that efforts should continue to be made to improve quality control of language services at all duty stations;

7. *Takes note with appreciation* of the note by the Secretary-General on career development in language services — measures aimed at reducing excessive vacancy rates at some duty stations: elements of a system of managed assignments,[16] and requests the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly informed of developments in this area;

8. *Notes with concern* that the rate of self-revision exceeded the established benchmark and even tended to increase at all duty stations;

9. *Recognizes* that an increase in the use of temporary assistance and contractual translation services could increase the need for revision at the senior levels;

10. *Notes with concern* that some documents issued in Arabic tend to follow a consistent pattern of excessively literal translation, by focusing more on the vocabulary and

[14] A/54/176.
[15] A/53/919/Add.1.
[16] A/C.5/54/28.

not on the content of the original language, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that this situation will be rectified;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, should reflect the specificity of each language;

12. *Also requests* the Secretary-General, in order to further improve the quality of translation of documents issued in the six official languages, to ensure continuous dialogue between translation staff and interpretation staff, among United Nations headquarters at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and between translation divisions and Member States with regard to the standardization of the terminology used;

13. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that Member States, which are the main users of United Nations documents, are briefed periodically on the terminology used;

14. *Decides* to keep the matter under review through consultations with Member States concerned;

E

Information technology

Having considered the report of the Secretary-General on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites,[17]

1. *Notes* the request of the Committee on Information that the Secretary-General continue to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the Organization and continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee on Information at its next session;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to improve and update the access and retrieval of documents from the United Nations web sites and from the optical disk system equally in the six official languages at all duty stations by March 2000;

3. *Also requests* the Secretary-General in formalizing the structure of the Information Technology Section to ensure that the six official languages are treated equally;

4. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the goal of equal treatment of the six official languages is taken into account in the course of the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web sites;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take necessary measures to improve access to the web page of the Procurement Division;

6. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to report on the measures taken pursuant to requests made under this section by the end of April 2000, and decides to revert to this matter during the resumed fifty-fourth session;

F

Recalling its decision 38/401 of 23 September 1983, section E of its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997 and section E of its resolution 53/208 of 18 December 1998 concerning the prohibition of smoking in small conference rooms and the discouragement of smoking in large conference rooms,

[17] A/AC.198/1999/6.

1. *Calls upon* representatives of Member States to abide by its decision 38/401, section E of its resolution 52/214 and section E of its resolution 53/208;

2. *Encourages* all users of United Nations conference facilities, in order to avoid involuntary exposure to passive smoking, to refrain from smoking, in particular in conference rooms.